

USCIRF Puts India on Watch List for Religious oppression. Cause for concern.

By: R. Ajeev Srinivasan and P.R. Ganapathy

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No, the report is surprisingly one-sided

Americans are good at making up great—and deceptive—marketing names; the “**United States Commission on International Religious Freedom**” (**USCIRF**) is one. The name implies it monitors religious freedoms internationally. Not quite: this group, consisting overwhelmingly of evangelical Christians, appears interested only in the right of various Christian cults to propagate in other countries.

The USCIRF is quiet on whether non-Christians have any rights in the United States itself. To me it appears the commission believes America is a purely Christian nation, even though the Founding Fathers were emphatically secular. Indeed some of them—notably Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson—had a horror of Christian dogma, and said so in no uncertain terms.

Yes, the concerns expressed are valid

The decision of the **USCIRF** to put India on a “watch list” over the inadequate protection of religious minorities has many Indians incensed. Instead of a reflexive attack of the commission’s motives and a “they did it first,” defense of the Indian government’s past behavior, it behooves us to study whether some of the criticisms contained in the report are valid, and whether we might find some of its suggestions useful, as India seeks to improve itself as a nation.

A careful and open-minded reading of the report shows that the **USCIRF** is concerned about the systematic breakdown of institutional machinery in preventing religious atrocities. We have known that elements of the law and order machinery displayed apathy or even actively colluded

with the perpetrators on several occasions. The judicial process takes years to bring the guilty to book. Mainstream political parties continue to grant tickets to indicted individuals in election after election.